

A Study on the Relationship between Social Media Usage and Depression among Young Adults

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Abstract: *The present study examined the relationship between social media usage and depression among young adults. A quantitative, non-experimental correlational research design was taken. The sample consisted of 100 young adults aged 25–35 years, including 50 males and 50 females. Data were collected through a Google Form using the Social Media Usage Scale developed by Alison B. Tuck and Renee J. Thompson and the Beck Depression Inventory developed by Aaron T. Beck and colleagues. Descriptive statistics, the Shapiro–Wilk test, Spearman’s rank-order correlation, and Mann–Whitney U tests were used. Social media usage had a mean score of 43.36 (SD = 20.60), depression had a mean score of 16.15 (SD = 12.88). Both variables significantly deviated from normality. A moderate positive and statistically significant association was found between social media usage and depression, $r_s = .480$, $p < .001$. Gender differences were not statistically significant for social media usage, $U = 1011.00$, $z = -1.648$, $p = .099$, or depression, $U = 1198.00$, $z = -0.359$, $p = .720$. The results indicate that higher social media usage was associated with higher depression scores.*

Keywords: social media usage, depression, young adults, psychological well-being, Spearman correlation

1. Introduction

Social media, particularly among young adults has become an important part of everyday life. It provides opportunities for communication, information sharing, has become an important part of everyday life, social interaction and self-expression. At the same time, frequent or problematic use has raised concern regarding psychological well-being. Research has examined associations between social media use and depression, Psychological distress, anxiety, social comparison, sleep difficulties, and self-esteem.

Young adulthood is marked by changes in identity, education, interpersonal relationships, employment, and increasing independence. But, Social media may influence this period by shaping communication and self-evaluation. Social Comparison Theory suggests that individuals compare with others and evaluate themselves. Social networking environments can repeatedly expose users to selectively presented achievements, lifestyles, appearances and relationships. For some individuals, such environments may contribute to negative self-evaluation and inadequacy.

The relationship between social media use and depression is very complex. Social media can provide access to information, emotional support, belongingness, while excessive or problematic use may be related to negative psychological consequences. Recent researches have reported associations between problematic social media use and symptoms of depression, although findings vary according to age, context, measurement and type of use. Therefore, the present study examined the relationship between social media usage and depression among young adults who are aged 25–35 years.

2. Objectives

This study aimed to assess social media usage and depression, find out their relationship, and determine whether significant gender differences are there in social media usage and

depression. Specifically, the objectives were to assess social media usage; measure depression; examine the relationship between the two variables; examine gender differences in social media usage; and examine gender differences in depression.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Participants

A quantitative, non-experimental correlational research design was undertaken. The sample consisted of 100 young adults aged 25–35 years, comprising 50 males and 50 females. Participants participated voluntarily and were included according to the study criteria.

3.2 Measures

Social Media Usage Scale which was developed by Alison B. Tuck and Renee J. Thompson was used to assess social media usage and the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), developed by Aaron T. Beck and colleagues was used to assess depression. Demographic information was collected along with the study measures.

3.3 Procedure and Ethics

Data were collected with informed consent, demographic information, and the study measures through the Google form. Participation was done voluntarily. The purpose of the study, privacy, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw were informed to the participants. The responses were handled responsibly and used for the academic purposes.

3.4 Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were calculated to study the variables. Normality was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test. As both variables significantly deviated from normality, Spearman’s rank-order correlation was used to examine the relationship

between both variables and Mann–Whitney U tests were used to examine gender differences.

4. Results

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for social media usage and depression.

Variable	N	M	SD	Median	Min.	Max.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Social Media Usage	100	43.36	20.60	38.00	17	153	2.003	6.963
Depression	100	16.15	12.88	14.50	0	52	0.779	0.147

The mean social media usage score was 43.36 (SD = 20.60), the mean depression score was 16.15 (SD = 12.88). Social media usage showed positive skewness and high kurtosis, indicating departure from normality.

Table 2: Shapiro–Wilk test of normality.

Variable	W	df	p
Social Media Usage	.834	100	< .001
Depression	.933	100	< .001

The Shapiro–Wilk test was significant for social media usage, $W(100) = .834$, $p < .001$, and depression, $W(100) = .933$, $p < .001$. Thus, normality was not met for either variable.

Table 3: Spearman's rank-order correlation.

Variables	r_s	p	N
Social Media Usage – Depression	.480	< .001	100

A moderate positive and statistically significant association was found between social media usage and depression, $r_s = .480$, $p < .001$, $N = 100$. Higher social media usage was associated with higher depression scores.

Table 4: Mann–Whitney U tests for gender differences

Outcome	Male Mean Rank	Female Mean Rank	U	z	p
Social Media Usage	45.72	55.28	1011.00	-1.648	.099
Depression	49.46	51.54	1198.00	-0.359	.720

There was no statistically significant gender difference in social media usage, $U = 1011.00$, $z = -1.648$, $p = .099$. Similarly, depression did not differ significantly by gender, $U = 1198.00$, $z = -0.359$, $p = .720$.

5. Discussion

The main outcome of the research is moderate, positive and statistically significant relationship between social media usage and depression. Participants reporting higher social media usage also tended to report higher levels of depression. This finding is broadly consistent with the literature reviewed in the study, which has identified relationships between problematic or frequent social media use and depressive symptoms.

Possible psychological effects include social comparison, fear of missing out, negative online interactions, exposure to idealized content, and disruption of sleep or daily routines. However, these explanations are not causal findings of the present study. Individuals using social media more frequently may also experience these symptoms for distraction, connection, or coping. Thus, it requires further investigation for the direction of the relationship.

No statistically significant gender differences were observed in either social media usage or depression. The difference was not significant, even though females had a higher mean rank for social media usage. Depression mean ranks were also similar between males and females. Therefore, gender did not significantly differentiate either outcome in this sample.

6. Implications

The findings may be useful for mental-health professionals and counselling psychologists who are working with young adults. When individuals present with depressive symptoms or emotional difficulties, assessment of digital habits may be considered.

Psychoeducational programmes can be used to encourage balanced social media use, physical activity, meaningful offline relationships, healthy sleep routines and appropriate help-seeking. Counselling interventions may also address emotional regulation, self-esteem, social comparison, and adaptive coping.

7. Limitations and Future Research

The study was limited by the sample size of 100 participants, with restricted age range of 25–35 years, self-report measures, online Google Form data collection, self-report and cross-sectional correlational design. Therefore, the findings cannot establish causality. So, a larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, variables such as loneliness, self-esteem, fear of missing out, social comparison, sleep quality, and social support and platform-specific measures can be used in future studies. Research may also distinguish active from passive social media use.

8. Conclusion

The study demonstrated a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between social media usage and depression among young adults, $r_s = .480$, $p < .001$. Higher social media usage was associated with higher levels of depression.

No statistically significant gender differences were found in social media usage or depression. The findings highlight the importance of balanced digital media usage while emphasizing that the correlational design does not permit causal interpretation.

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